Canadian Centre
For Foreign Policy
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Centre canadien
pour le développement
de la politique étrangère

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FROM PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS: THE EDMONTON ROUNDTABLE ON TRENDS IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

CCFPD

April 12, 2001 (Edmonton, AB, Canada)

8012.4E

125 promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2
Telephone/Téléphone : **613 944 8278** Fax/Télécopieur : **613 944 0687**
www.cfp-pec.gc.ca

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Summary of Key Points from Brief Presentations and Discussions: The Edmonton Roundtable on Trends in U.S. Foreign Policy

April 12, 2001

The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development and the University of Alberta

Edmonton, AB, Canada

On April 12, 2001, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, in partnership with the University of Alberta (Edmonton), organised a roundtable on Trends in U.S. Foreign Policy. The roundtable was the third in a series of discussions taking place in the U.S. and Canada over a three months period (San Diego - March 20, Washington - April 2, Toronto - May 18, Halifax - TBD, Denver - TBD). Canadian thinkers and officials addressed:

1) isolationism/engagement and unilateralism/multilateralism; U.S. administration/Congress,
2) defence/strategy,
3) trade, energy and environment.

Among the participants were Andy Knight (University of Alberta), Alex Moens (Simon Fraser University), Brian Job (University of British Columbia), and Carolyn James (University of Calgary). Peter Moore (Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development) and Blair Bobyk (U.S. Relations Division) attended from DFAIT.

I. Isolationism/Engagement and Unilateralism/Multilateralism; U.S. Administration/Congress

- According to the doctrine of US exceptionalism, the US sees itself as qualitatively different from other states. America therefore believes it can be exempted from certain norms, or rules of conduct, in particular instances. Elements of exceptionalism have been an historical undercurrent in US foreign policy.

- The alternative to unilateralism for the US is not multilateralism in the traditional sense, but rather the formation of select groups of strategic allies (in which the US remains the dominant player) in order to deal with specific issues or crises. The US will seek coalitions to garner moral weight for their actions abroad. As a key architect of the structural foundations of the modern international system, Americans will remain committed to multilateralism as long as it continues to serve their purposes.

- The US will always intervene when its vital interests are threatened. Where possible, it will try to do so with the support of allies. But when 'push comes to shove,' the US is prepared and willing to go it alone.

- The Bush Administration will be occupied with safeguarding US primacy in global affairs and is interested in further extending America's hegemony and comparative advantage in terms of relative power capabilities. However, a number of prominent foreign policy failures in the post-Cold War era has led to a coupling of primacy with frustration.

- The isolationist term is an inappropriate characterization of contemporary US foreign policy. As the Bush team pulls back from a number of issues (such as the Middle East peace process, global climate change negotiations, etc.), it is more a question of degrees of interventionism and engagement than a dramatic move across the ideological spectrum towards isolationism. There is a sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant, distinction in the US between two types of internationalism–militant internationalism versus liberal internationalism. The new administration will emphasize the former.

- US foreign policy under the Bush Administration will witness a high degree of ideological activism married with exceptionalism. Under this approach, issues will increasingly be seen in more black and white terms with the implication that responses to international problems will come quickly and with little consideration of possible long-term consequences or impacts on allies. Such an approach can also lead to highly confrontational policy stances.

- It is questionable whether the US government can actually set priorities in the post-Cold War era. Instead of pursuing a set foreign policy agenda as many have been led to believe, the Bush Administration could easily find itself in response mode.

- On the other hand, to assert at this time that US foreign policy under the Bush Administration will be in "response mode" is simply premature. Former governors often take time to establish their foreign policy priorities, and this administration has clearly stated that policy reviews are taking place on most issues. In addition, the top members of the Bush team are individuals with a public record of setting long-term objectives based on clear policy direction. As a result, now, rather than later, is the time for Canada to communicate to Washington issue concerns and potential Canadian contributions to US objectives.

- The foreign policy continuities (such as a commitment to the Balkans in the short-term, further reductions in nuclear warhead levels, reinvigorated Iraqi sanctions, support for trade regimes) between the Clinton and Bush Administrations should not be underestimated and overlooked. Moreover, US ties to global and regional interests and this administration's close links with the business community will serve to moderate international policy. Interdependence will pull the US into multilateral contexts.

- This administration intends to play hard ball and put more backbone in US foreign policy. If allies such as Canada want access and influence in Washington, they will have to front up the requisite resources. With a greater emphasis on burden-sharing, good ideas alone become less important than capabilities. Without clear signals from Ottawa that Canada will be doing more to pull our weight internationally, we run the risk of being marginalized by the US and the EU. The willingness of allies to contribute resources will be a defining feature of US multilateralism.

- President Bush is giving Mexico substantial attention because there is a great deal at stake in terms of both opportunities (trade, democratization, stability, etc.) and challenges (drugs, immigration, etc.). Canada should work with Mexico and the US to find areas of common ground in order to help develop more sound relations. However, greater Canada-Mexico bilateral cooperation could arouse US fears of encirclement.

- The true nature of Bush's relationship with Congress is one of the big questions that has yet to be determined. Intra-party divisions create additional political dynamics. Some feel that an assertive right-wing within the Republican Party will lead to a certain degree of pandering by the Bush foreign policy team on certain issues. Cuba and North Korea are likely targets for hardened US postures in order to placate conservative congressional Republicans. Conversely, others note that with a closely divided Congress, right-wing tendencies will be token at best.

II. Defence/Strategy

- The United States is looking more and more to technology, global reach, and global strike capabilities. The former doctrine of preparing US forces for two simultaneous regional contingencies will give way to a more exclusive focus on preparing for conflict in one major theatre.

- The weaponization of outer space is seen by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld as a key means of US force projection. In order to empower US foreign policy, this administration will search for ways to strike quickly worldwide without fear of retaliation. The US is seeking strategic impunity through measures such as NMD and homeland defence.

- National Missile Defence (NMD) is one area where the US will take a dramatically different policy direction. There are now different types of missile defences for a variety of purposes–NMD to protect the homeland and Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) to protect allies and US troops abroad. Missile defences are seen as a key way of maintaining and enhancing America's military technology gap over the rest of the world.

- The Bush team is presenting a radical new approach to arms control–they will take unilateral measures if necessary to overcome what is now perceived as an out-of-date and constraining framework designed for a bygone era. The Bush Administration is interested

in jettisoning the concept of mutual deterrence (which they see as mutual vulnerability) in order to open the door to more unilateral options and ensure continued US flexibility for international operations and interventions.

- Although as of yet there is no set time line regarding the development of NMD/TMD, the decision to proceed with such a system is being presented as a *fait accompli*. If the next round of tests in June are successful, NMD will receive an automatic green light.
- Noticeably absent from the missile defence discourse in the US is the real threat of miniature nuclear devices or suitcase bombs being smuggled into American territory. Rogue states will resort to smuggled weapons if missile defences are proven to be effective. Additionally, the development of missile defence systems will lead to a new round of proliferation and a renewal of the arms race. The point is: the condition of mutual vulnerability is an inescapable aspect of the contemporary international system.

- After extensive support for arms control and disarmament regimes, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Canada will be forced to backpedal very quickly once confronted with the reality of NMD due to the lack of real policy options or alternatives.

- The Pacific theatre is increasingly being emphasized as the most probable zone of future confrontation. China is currently a major preoccupation of US security strategy and is the most profound area of change in Bush's foreign policy thus far. Canada must develop a China policy that is outside and not influenced by our bilateral relationship with the US.

- The shift from the ambiguous 'strategic partner' nomenclature towards the 'strategic competitor' term is akin to redefining the China-US relationship in adversarial terms. Again, the important Republican business constituency will moderate such views to a certain extent and some believe the competitor rhetoric will wane since a confrontational stance vis-a-vis China is not in America's long-term national interests.

- After the internal Pentagon review is complete, we can expect to see an American disengagement from the Balkans. This disengagement may resemble a sort of 'Vietnamization' of this peacekeeping mission whereby the Europeans are deputized and expected to get a handle on their own regional affairs.

- The Russian build-up of its strategic bomber capabilities in its northern regions will bring a reinvigorated importance to NORAD and consequently, Canada.

- In terms of changes to specific weapons systems, the US will de-emphasize large aircraft carriers, which are seen as too vulnerable, and instead focus on long-range bombing capabilities. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) will be deployed for strike purposes in addition to reconnaissance. More specifically, Secretary Rumsfeld has indicated that he favours the procurement of fewer F-22s, but wants to obtain these fighters sooner. The future of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) is certainly in doubt, although the recent British

commitment of $2.5 billion in funding may be its saving grace.

- American participation is absolutely necessary for any successful multilateral intervention. The US will continue to insist that its forces remain under US command. There will be less reliance on UN-sponsored peacekeeping missions in general.

- Terrorism remains a key pillar of US defence policy. Incidents such as Ressam highlight Canada's inability to deter smuggling and terrorism. The open border has become something of a hindrance and there will be attempts to 'Americanize' Canadian attitudes towards terrorism.

III. Trade, Energy & Environment

- NAFTA is far and away the critical economic institution for Canada. Adjustments to NAFTA will take place amidst the context of a dramatic economic slowdown. Chapter 11 of NAFTA has been interpreted in ways that are detrimental to the Government of Canada's capacity to act independently to protect the public interest. The prerogatives of government, not simply those of business, must be protected.

- Trade disputes with the US have the potential to exacerbate Canada's regional disparities (such as in the case of PEI potatoes and softwood lumber). Moreover, increased development in Alberta and the Northwest Territories will result in greater disconnects between economic and political power for these regions.

- Canada has been asleep at the wheel on the issue of International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITARs). We cannot sit back and allow the US to unilaterally dictate the approach when it comes to defining what constitutes defence goods and which specific items are subject to export controls.

- If the US is going to try to ensure its primacy in the world, it will undertake efforts to ensure its dominant role in global trade. National Security Advisor Rice has stated that trade is a useful way of promoting America's social and political values abroad.

- Trade, especially trade in energy, is Canada's ticket for access to Washington in the future, since we are otherwise marginalized in strategic and defence terms due to a lack of capabilities. America views Canada as a sort of fuel tank for their economy. Synthetic crude oil will be the supreme attraction for the US. The US will principally see Canada as a geoeconomic partner, rather than a geopolitical or geostrategic partner.

- The potential environmental implications of oil sands development need to be carefully taken into account. At least 12 projects worth approximately $30 billion in investment are currently underway around Fort McMurray, AB, to tap into the oil sands. Environmental assessments are done on a case-by-case basis and do not assess the overall regional

impact and cumulative environmental effects. Given the likely scale of development, it is reasonable to expect considerable environmental consequences of oil sands development, even with improvements to technology and better environmental safeguards.

- First Nations' support of northern oil and gas pipelines exists as long as there is co-ownership and stakes in equity. The Beaufort Sea boundary dispute is likely to flare up again as a result of possible pipeline routing through this area. Pressure will be exerted by US multinationals.

- Canada must have scientifically sound and clearly established data demonstrating the drawbacks to oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) if we want to be effective in the US political marketplace. At the moment, however, there are distinct signs that the Bush Administration is backing away from efforts to open the ANWR to oil exploration.

- An opposite about-face has occurred in the area of climate change. It is dismaying that this administration is working in the old 1970s paradigm of "what's good for the environment is bad for the economy." This augurs badly for all sorts of issues, including the likelihood of achieving further reductions in transboundary sulfur dioxide.

- The scientific evidence is clear that as a result of the effects of climate change, diminished polar ice cover will lead to at least 2-4 months of ice-free open water in Canada's far north, thereby extending the shipping season through the northwest passage. Japan, Europe and the US will be extremely interested in such shipping routes, which have the potential to ignite Canadian nationalism to the detriment of Canada-US relations, similar to what occurred with the Manhattan incident. There is a movement to devise a scheme for shipping in polar regions and the important question is will Canada manage this issue correctly?

- The next big emotional issue will be over water. Given the shortages in the American west and southwest, US policymakers are starting to give this issue consideration. The issue of bulk water exports could serve to reinvigorate the critical left in Canada.

Participants

David Bercuson	University of Calgary
Blair Bobyk	Department of Foreign Affairs
Julian Castro-Rea	University of Alberta
John Cotton	Trade and Investment Division, Alberta Economic Development
Gurston Dacks	University of Alberta
Satya Das	Cambridge Strategies
James Fergusson	University of Manitoba
Antonio Franceschet	University of Alberta
Holger Herwig	University of Calgary
Rob Heubert	University of Calgary
Carolyn James	University of Calgary
Wenran Jiang	University of Alberta
Brian Job	University of British Columbia
Tom Keating	University of Alberta
Renny Khan	University of Alberta International
Andy Knight	University of Alberta
Juris Lejnieks	University of Alberta
Melanie McCallum	Alberta International & Intergovernmental Relations
Alex Moens	Simon Fraser University
Peter Moore	Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development
Don Munton	University of Northern British Columbia
Shaun Narine	University of British Columbia
Ken Norrie	University of Alberta
Doug Ross	Simon Fraser University
Allen Sens	University of British Columbia
Gordon Smith	University of Victoria
Ian Urquhart	University of Alberta
Dave Whitson	University of Alberta
Mark Zacher	University of British Columbia